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Georgia Southern University Students Working to Make Community Stronger

OCTOBER 14, 2009



A group of Georgia Southern students are developing partnerships between the University and local agencies, through the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement's new Community Liaisons program.

The program connects Georgia Southern students with the local community in meaningful ways. This fall, students are working at Habitat for Humanity, Keep Bulloch Beautiful, Joseph's Home for Boys, the Performance Learning Center and the Statesboro-Bulloch County Parks and Recreation Department, to manage and recruit volunteers from the University and plan various events that benefit the agencies.

"The program creates a win-win situation for everyone involved the students are gaining valuable leadership experience while the community agencies are thrilled to have extra helpers," said Janna Pennington, Georgia Southern University's service-learning coordinator.

"I am committed to building a better community through hands-on experiences. This program gives me the opportunity to build a bridge for students to cross over into the community and make a difference," said Natalia Daies, a senior public relations major from Cleveland, Texas, who is the community liaison at Joseph's Home for Boys. "Any time I leave the home after spending time with them, I feel like they have made me a better person. It is a humbling experience. They each have very different personalities that make me want to come back and do whatever I can for them."

The community liaisons have been involved with a wide variety of projects this semester. For example, Victoria Greene has recruited Georgia Southern students to serve as mentors for high school students at the Performance Learning Center, Jessica Spaleta is organizing Keep Bulloch Beautiful's tailgate recycling program and Brit Lanier has scheduled Georgia Southern groups to build at Habitat for Humanity every Saturday this semester.

"As a community liaison, I am thrilled to go to work. Every day brings new exciting challenges," said Lanier, a junior accounting major from Kennesaw, Ga. "Opportunities like these are the reason I chose Georgia Southern because they develop your leadership ability and prepare you for a future in an ever-changing world."

"By participating in the program, I have become more organized and efficient, developed positive relationships within the Statesboro community and enhanced my communication skills," said Spaleta, a junior exercise science major from Charlotte, N.C. "By seeing events such as tailgate recycling be successful and watching volunteers engage in the service project and enjoy it, I feel I am accomplishing my mission as a community liaison."

For the program, the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement looked for students with proven leadership ability, a strong record of volunteerism/community service and a desire to make a positive impact on the university and local community. From more than 70 applicants, five outstanding campus leaders were chosen to serve as community liaisons.

The program is an ideal fit for students like Spaleta, who has done volunteer work throughout her college career. As an incoming freshman she helped construct a Habitat for Humanity house with the BUILD (Building Undergraduate Involvement in Leadership Development) program. That inspired her to join various student organizations and volunteer for non-profit organizations and community events.

“Volunteering has become a part of me,” Spaleta said. “The Community Liaisons program incorporates many opportunities that spark my interest and parallel my commitment to serve the community and my school.”

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